

Talking Points for the DDI
SOVA/CS/ [redacted]
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Soviet Views of an Iranian Invasion of Iraq

Soviets against it.

-- Soviets have--in a low-key way--made known in public and private that they oppose an Iranian move into Iraq.

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In Soviet eyes, the liabilities of an Iranian invasion greatly outweigh any potential advantages.

-- On the plus side:

** They have no love for Saddam, who has been moving away from Moscow, and would like him out.

** They would welcome any instability in conservative Persian Gulf states that Iranian predominance in Baghdad might produce.

-- But on the other hand:

** They have no interest in seeing spread of Iranian-style fundamentalism near their southern border.

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- ** Pro-Iranian, clerical regime in Baghdad would further undermine Soviet position there.
 - ** An Iran that is predominant in Gulf would be even less susceptible to Soviet inroads.
 - ** In wake of defeat in Lebanon of 2 Soviet allies-- Syria and the PLO--defeat of another government, which has a friendship treaty with Moscow, would deal a sharp blow to USSR's image and position in Middle East.

If Iran invades, Soviets are likely to avoid decisive action in order to preserve their position with both sides.

- If invasion were limited or got bogged down
 - ** Soviets would continue generally noncommittal policy that they have maintained throughout the war and might attempt to promote mediated settlement.
- If Iran drove deep into Iraq
 - ** Soviets could step up weapons deliveries to Iraq, cut-off transit of Iranian imports through USSR, employ Syria to urge restraint on Iran and issue private and implicit public warnings to Tehran to desist.
- These are unlikely to deter Iranians, however,
 - ** Iraqis already have surplus of arms and Tehran not likely to listen to verbal appeals from any quarter.

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- Soviets possess capability for more forceful military measures. They could:
 - ** Order their 1,000 military advisers in Iraq to assist Iraqis in battle.
 - ** Deploy air defense personnel and fighter pilots.
 - ** Deploy airborne forces to Iraq.
 - ** Pressure Tehran by mobilizing and maneuvering forces on Iranian border or conducting raids along Iranian-Afghan border.
 - Moscow is unlikely to take these steps
 - ** In themselves, they won't stop determined Iranian offensive, although they might act as a psychological deterrent on Tehran.
 - Iranian breakthrough would force Soviets to either employ the forces they sent-- which they would want to avoid--or suffer the embarrassment of withdrawal.
 - ** They would undermine Soviet Union's future prospects in Iran and might drive Tehran closer to West.
 - We believe USSR considers Iran a greater geopolitical prize than Iraq.
 - ** Such action would antagonize Iraq's adversary, Syria, which is a more important ally of the USSR. Damascus would contrast it sharply with Moscow's passivity in the Lebanon crisis.

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- ** Brezhnev's declining stamina and evidence that succession politicking is in process could make achieving a Politburo consensus on tough, risky decisions all the more difficult.
- If Iran takes Baghdad, Soviets:
 - ** Will attempt to make best of unwelcome situation and minimize strains with Tehran.
 - ** Might hope that an Iranian-installed regime in Baghdad will not last long and that Iraqi Army's continuing heavy dependence on Soviet weaponry will enable USSR eventually to rebuild its position there.

Moscow will be quick to counter any US moves in response to an invasion.

- Any beefed-up US naval presence in Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf will be met with similar increases in strength of Soviet Indian Ocean Squadron.
- Soviets will attempt to make capital with Iran of any US regional military moves that appear to oppose invasion.

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